

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### What is “Community Outreach?”

Simply defined, community outreach is the practice of conducting local public awareness activities through targeted community interaction. Community outreach activities are defined here as those efforts that can directly affect the behavior of the driving public through local interaction. They are designed to educate the public about a particular issue using respected and locally relevant channels of communication. Focus groups conducted for the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* initiative found that friends and family are the most credible sources for delivering messages about transportation and air quality, followed by employers, businesses, and the media. Other local channels of communication range from civic organizations to environmental groups to healthcare organizations and associations. Successful community outreach focuses on the issue’s relevance to the community and acknowledges the community’s challenges in addressing the issue.

### Samples of Innovative Community Outreach Activities

There are a wide range of activities that could increase visibility of and attention to the issue of transportation and air quality in your community, from media-based outreach to outreach targeted to specific organizations and audiences.

Note: Your community outreach activities should be guided by a local needs assessment, not simply a checklist of activities that other areas have conducted. The fact that an activity has been effective in one community does not guarantee it will be successful in other sites.

#### *Activities that Provide Direct Interaction with the Public*

##### Outreach at State and County Fairs, Parades, and Other Community Events

- Display booths and the distribution of pencils, buttons, or other promotional/reminder items provide opportunities for face-to-face interaction with your target audience. The fun “What’s Your Air Quality I.Q.?” quiz (see “Marketing Materials”) can draw people to your exhibit and educate them about air pollution and traffic congestion. You could even offer a small prize for anyone who gets all of the correct answers (which are humorously obvious). Activities at local malls and shopping centers can provide an opportunity to reach the public to discuss trip-chaining, alternative transportation, and vehicle maintenance.
- Fund raising events provide opportunities to meet and educate the public. For example, the American Lung Association (ALA) of Washington sponsored a bicycle ride, “Trek for Clean Air,” and a mountain climbing event, “Climb for Clean Air,” which raised funds and emphasized the importance of reducing air pollution. For more information, call 206-441-5100, e-mail [alaw@alaw.org](mailto:alaw@alaw.org), or visit their web site at <http://www.alaw.org>.

## Volunteer-Based Initiatives

- In California, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District maximized participation in its local initiative by creating the “Smog Squad,” a volunteer-based, door-to-door initiative in specific neighborhoods. Volunteers spoke directly to community residents and distributed air quality information. For more information, call 916-874-4800, e-mail [sacaqmd@pacbell.net](mailto:sacaqmd@pacbell.net), or visit their web site at <http://www.sparetheair.com> or <http://www.airquality.org>.
- Youth and volunteer organizations can be recruited to distribute pamphlets and innovative giveaways, such as Post-It notes with the *It All Adds Up* vehicle icon and the phrase “Stick Together. Ride Share.” or shopping list pads with messages about the benefits of trip chaining and transportation choices on air quality and traffic congestion.
- The Chattanooga Lifestyle Initiative set up the Household Eco Team Program, which used a workbook and peer support to help citizens reduce auto emissions, conserve resources, and prevent waste. They personally contacted 50 households in 10 selected neighborhoods to encourage alternatives to single occupancy driving. Members of participating households formed volunteer Eco teams and each replicated the outreach through word-of-mouth in other neighborhoods. For more information, call 845-679-4830, e-mail [info@globalactionplan.org](mailto:info@globalactionplan.org), or visit their web site at <http://www.globalactionplan.org>.

## Outreach Through Local Businesses

- A number of ozone control programs have been successful working with automobile repair shops and gas stations to offer discounts on tune-ups.
- A marketing alliance and a local metropolitan planning organization partnered to promote ridesharing in a specific corridor. Activities included teaming with local businesses, such as the Carls, Jr. Restaurant chain, to offer free morning coffee for carpoolers.

## Town Hall Meetings

- These have been successful for many local initiatives, although they are most appropriate in small towns. Town hall meetings provide local coalition members and elected officials an opportunity to speak directly to the community about transportation and air quality issues and receive valuable feedback that can help refine initiative activities as well as promote an environmentally friendly transportation infrastructure.

## Hotlines and Toll-Free Numbers

- Hotlines and toll-free numbers are effective ways to inform the public. They can provide a recorded message, information on transportation alternatives, and even referrals for callers who want to get involved.

## Street Signage

- Highway variable message signs can be used to present brief, simple facts to the traveling public.

## Pledge Cards

- To document individuals' promises to try an alternative to driving alone once a week during ozone season, one community created monthly calendars or "commuter cards." The commuters were asked to write on the calendar the transportation modes they used and the mileage to and from their work destinations. Emissions reductions were estimated based on the number of miles not driven, and individuals were awarded prizes each month.

## World Wide Web Sites

- Web sites are another way to reach the general public and can be linked to other relevant sites. One county web site includes a questionnaire, with questions such as, "What is your daily round trip commute distance?" After the user completes the questionnaire, cost of commuting is calculated and potential ways to save money, such as biking/walking, riding the bus or subway, carpooling, etc., are displayed.

## *Activities Using Media Techniques*

### Speaker's Bureau

- To promote the importance and relevance of transportation and air quality issues in your area, you could establish a speaker's bureau of your coalition members who are available to speak at various organization or company meetings and/or schools in your area.

### Proclamations

- To highlight education initiatives as an important local issue, some programs have worked with the mayor's or governor's office to develop an official Proclamation designating a particular Transportation/Air Quality "Month" or "Day." This proclamation could be published in a local newspaper and highlighted at a kick-off press event.

## Special Days

- Identifying national and local events and special days that you can tie into provides a good media “hook” — such as “Try Transit Week” in September, “Car Care Month” in October, “Clean Air Month,” “National Transportation Week,” and “Bike to Work Day” in May — or create a day such as “Let’s Clean the Air Day.” Highlights from such events can be promoted in local newspapers and city publications. Tying into days with related messages is also important. For example, cyclists have promoted Earth Day as a day to bike to work.

## Working with Weather Newscasters

- The U.S. EPA produces “live ozone maps” using real time data from over 400 monitoring stations in 21 Eastern and Midwestern states. The ozone maps allow local media to deliver accurate and timely health messages about ozone pollution, giving residents the opportunity to take actions that will reduce air pollution and limit their exposure. For more information about the ozone maps, contact your state or local air pollution control agency or visit the EPA web site at <http://www.epa.gov/airnow>.
- A number of ozone episodic control initiatives have convinced weather newscasters to announce ozone alert days and promote the “10 Simple Steps” (see “Marketing Materials”) to reduce high ozone levels into the healthful range. In order to help the media understand and graphically depict ozone episodes, the ozone coalition in the Washington, D.C. region provides them with “live ozone maps.” For more information, call 410-308-0190 or visit their web site at <http://www.cleanairpartners.org>.
- The U.S. EPA has worked with *USA Today* to display on ozone alert day, a special “alert” icon in the weather box on the front page. Your local newspaper may be interested in providing the same community service.

## Traffic and Weather Ad Sponsorship

- Many local radio stations provide traffic and weather updates. Sponsoring them can be a cost-effective way to disseminate your messages, because drivers (your key target audience) are trapped in their cars and open to your suggestions. Typically, the announcer says “the following information is brought to you by your (*group’s name*),” provides the update, then ends with a 30-word message (see the :10 live-read radio ads in the “Marketing Materials” section).

## Local Celebrities in PSAs

- Producing PSAs specific to a local area with elected officials and other credible sources is a great way to gain exposure. The PennDOT Clean Air initiative used Governor Casey and a well-respected physician to deliver a health message. For more information, e-mail [webmaster@dot.state.pa.us](mailto:webmaster@dot.state.pa.us) or visit their web site at <http://www.dot.state.pa.us>. Former Virginia Governor George Allen was involved in frequent radio announcements about air quality in the Richmond area. As part of its “One Less Car” initiative, Bellevue, WA focused media attention on “One-Less-Car Stars,” community members who used their cars wisely by taking such actions as carpooling and trip chaining. For more information, call 425-452-6800 or visit their web site at <http://www.ci.bellevue.wa.us>.

## Media Luncheons

- A media luncheon on “ozone awareness” was hosted by local initiative organizers and resulted in a high turnout by the local press, generating many media stories. The luncheon was financed by local electric power and natural gas companies.

## Theater Slides

- Local movie theaters can be encouraged to show your PSAs before their feature film. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) developed a 20-minute rotation of full-screen cinema ads on three mobile-source air pollution messages. The ads incorporate visual images and questions-and-answers on vehicle-related air pollution. DEP has created seven “Screen Seen” ads, which can be used as is or adapted by other communities. For more information, call 207-287-2437, e-mail [ronald-severance@state.me.us](mailto:ronald-severance@state.me.us), or visit <http://www.state.me.us/dep>.

## Arena Jumbotrons

- Sports arenas may be willing to show the television PSAs on their jumbotrons. One “hook” could be games that coincide with Earth Day. The Yankees ran the ads during seven home games and on their electronic scoreboards at Shea Stadium before the World Series.

## Phone Lines

- Some programs have established a dedicated phone line for information regarding local transportation and air quality issues. It is answered by a staff member or volunteer who can field media and citizen calls and can also serve as a clearinghouse for materials on these issues that have been developed by local organizations and associations.

## ***Activities Targeting Employers***

### Vanpool Promotions

- One local program used advertisements in newspapers, information booths at transit fairs, and signage on vans to encourage people to join or initiate a vanpool. Program representatives also went to area businesses to promote vanpools and explain commuter and air quality benefits to employers and employees.

### Employer Recognition

- Many ozone control programs recognize employers who are active members of their coalitions or proactive in encouraging employee participation (e.g., by providing transit discounts, allowing flexible work schedules, etc.). Awards honoring these companies can be announced at events and through the media. Employees can be recognized internally, through company newsletters, e-mails, or an internal “intranet” web site.
- In one city, initiative sponsors provided employers with certificates acknowledging that they were “founding partners” of the employer transportation and air quality coalition.
- The Wisconsin Partners for Clean Air worked with employers to award their employees with a ticket for each “clean commute,” for example, using alternative transportation or carpooling. The tickets were entered in a monthly prize drawing. The Partners also produced a newsletter that highlighted innovative employer activities and distributed it to all the employers in their coalition. For more information, e-mail [burrs@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:burrs@dnr.state.wi.us) or visit their web site at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>.

### Promotional Items

- See “Marketing Materials” for exemplary specialty items created by *It All Adds Up* communities.
- You could work with large employers and/or local utility companies to include printed inserts with their invoices and paychecks.
- Notepads containing printed information — tips on trip chaining or facts about transportation choices that affect air quality — can be provided to employers.
- Producing a calendar with local scenes, school transportation and air quality poster contest winners, or messages about transportation options and activities that improve the quality of life could be a good investment. Calendars stay in view for a full year, and particular events, such as “Try Transit Week” or “Bike to Work Day,” can be highlighted. Local businesses, such as vehicle service stations and transit companies, could insert coupons and possibly help with the printing costs. For more information, call 805-645-1400 or e-mail [info@vcapcd.org](mailto:info@vcapcd.org).

## *Activities Targeting Youth*

### Mascots

- Mascots have been used in a variety of public education efforts. Producing a costume can be inexpensive, and mascots are popular at county fairs, Earth Day celebrations, school assemblies, and community presentations.

### Youth and Special Events

- The “Let Kids Lead - Youth VMT Initiative,” sponsored by the Academy for Educational Development and launched in Kansas City, Boston, and Tampa, was aimed at educating kids about transportation and air quality issues. The programs, “Barriers to Use of Non-Polluting Transportation” in Liberty, MO, “Alternatives for Community Environment” in Boston, MA, and “Airwise Program: “Don’t Be An Airhead, Be Air Wise” in Tampa, FL, empowered kids to work on their communities’ transportation and air quality challenges, and to educate their peers and their communities. For more information, call 202-884-8000 or e-mail [admin@aed.org](mailto:admin@aed.org).
- By involving local Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H clubs in your public education efforts, they can learn about local issues as well as deliver initiative messages to the community. For example, Girl Scouts could distribute informational material along with Girl Scout cookies.
- Involving youth in special events, such as “Clean Air Month,” encourages them to learn about local and national issues. Activities could include a youth forum or brainstorming session for children to determine what they can do to help.
- NIE, Newspapers in Education, is a cooperative effort between schools and newspapers to promote the use of newspapers as an educational resource. The Newspaper Association of America Foundation is the administrative organization for over 700 NIE programs in the United States. The Foundation provides resources and training to newspapers and educators on using newspapers in schools; helps newspapers develop strategic plans for promoting and marketing their NIE services; and represents newspapers with a broad variety of educational partners. NAA Foundation has also compiled a list of NIE sites from across the country and around the world. To learn more about NIE, contact Jim Abbott at 703-902-1730, e-mail [abboy@naa.org](mailto:abboy@naa.org), or visit <http://www.naa.org>.

### Workshops for Teachers

- Holding workshops to educate teachers is valuable in providing accurate information that can be incorporated into classroom presentations and hands-on demonstrations. Students then bring the information home to their family and friends.

## ***Activities Involving Transit Companies***

### **Revamping and Distributing Route Maps**

- Often, potential transit users avoid the service because they are unsure of how to use it, or confused by the route schedules and maps. The City of Boulder, Colorado, promoted their HOP and SKIP Shuttle routes by distributing brochures and two-color route maps in public locations. For more information, call 303-441-3090 or visit their web site at <http://www.ci.boulder.co.us>.

### **Trial Ridership**

- Trial Ridership can be a great way to win over commuters to transit services. Incentives include free rides or discounted fares for new residents on ozone alert days, and can be distributed via company newsletters or local newspapers.

### **Bus Advertising**

- LYNX, the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority, hand-painted a CNG bus with the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* tagline and messages. (see photo in the Summary Report of the First Five Years Report, Tab N).
- Pierce Transit, in Tacoma, WA, used advertisements on their compressed natural gas (CNG) buses as an effective method for promoting clean air. The blue and white ads read “Clean Machine. We’re Commuting Without Polluting,” and riders were given brochures describing the emission reductions achieved by CNG buses. The transit company also issued “new neighbor” packets to new residents. For more information, call 253-581-8000 or visit their web site at <http://www.piercetransit.org>.

## ***Activities Involving Bicycle Clubs***

- Many people who have access to short, safe bike routes to work, shopping, and recreation avoid using them because they are unsure of how to dress or transport items, or they are confused by bike maps. The Washington Area Bicyclist Association provides mentors and is working on a computer-assisted match program. For more information contact them at 202-658-2500 or [www.waba.org](http://www.waba.org).
- You could work with your community bike club(s) and stores to distribute information in their newsletters, at events, and on their websites.



### ***Recognition of Program Partners***

- It is important to show appreciation for the organizations, coalition members, and media outlets that have supported your efforts. One way to do this is by giving them recognition certificates, which can be simple to design and produce. It is a good idea to include your organization's logo and a signature from one of your high-ranking officials.